

U.S. COAST GUARD LICENSE REQUIREMENTS

Any person operating any vessel (including auxiliary sail vessels) propelled by machinery and carrying at least one passenger for hire must be licensed by the USCG for service in the area in which they operate. A person operating a sail vessel with no propulsion machinery carrying more than six passengers, with at least one for hire, must be similarly licensed. The licensing of individuals helps ensure operators have a certain level of experience and knowledge of navigational and boating principles.

“Passengers for hire” means a passenger for whom consideration is contributed as a condition of carriage on the vessel, whether directly or indirectly flowing to the owner, operator or any other person having an interest in the vessel. The law was amended with the passage of the Passenger Vessel Safety Act, which became effective on December 20, 1993, to allow **voluntary** sharing of the actual expenses of the voyage, as is the normal custom among friends, by monetary contribution or donation of fuel, food, beverage or other supplies. This type of voluntary sharing does not make a passenger for hire situation.

Everyone on board the vessel is defined as a passenger EXCEPT the owner, master, and crew. In order to be considered crew a person must be engaged in the business of the vessel, not have contributed consideration for carriage AND be paid for their services on board. These “crew” are afforded all the rights and protections under the law which employees are guaranteed.

When carrying one or more passengers for hire, on a vessel of less than 100 gross tons, it is illegal to carry more than six passengers unless the vessel has a valid USCG issued Certificate of Inspection. Vessels of 100 gross tons or more must have a valid Certificate of Inspection when carrying over twelve passengers at least one of which is for hire. A Certificate of Inspection is issued to a vessel following plan approval, stability tests and completion of a thorough inspection by the USCG.

The Passenger Vessel Safety Act also changed the rules pertaining to chartered vessels. A chartered vessel is one that has been contracted for or rented with or without crew. The Act required vessels of less than 100 gross tons that are chartered with crew to be inspected if they carry more than six passengers. In those charter agreements where a crew is not provided the threshold for inspection is at twelve passengers.

Civil Penalties for violation of the vessel inspection regulations can be as much as \$5,000 and up to \$1,000 for licensing violations. USCG licensed operators can also face charges against their license for violating vessel inspection and operation requirements.

The USCG and your local officials are requesting your assistance in ensuring that operators carrying passengers for hire are in compliance with U.S. and California laws regarding boating. Safe and sober boating will enhance the experience of those taking advantage of many recreational opportunities. Additional information may be obtained from the USCG Marine Safety Office, San Francisco Bay. For licensing matters, please call (510) 437-5381. For vessel inspection call (510) 437-3119. To contact the fishing vessel safety examiner call (510) 437-5788. To report unsafe or illegal operations, please call the Senior Investigations Officer at (510) 437-3148. You may remain anonymous if you desire.